

Reducing poverty in the first 18 years of life: Vietnam

This illustration presents findings from a research project on monetary and multidimensional child poverty in Vietnam based on survey data from the Government Statistical Office (GSO) from 2004, 2006 and 2008 and discussions with 78 children and 145 adults in Mekong River Delta Region in October 2013.

This research tries to understand why some children may lack basic needs such as food or shelter or access to services including education and health despite living in a relatively wealthy family or why other children who live in families with little income are able to go to school or have good living conditions.

Findings

1. Having enough income is important for ensuring good child wellbeing but multidimensional child poverty and monetary poverty are not the same.

In other words, there are children living in low income households with low wealth (monetary poor) but who have good child wellbeing (not multidimensionally poor). By the same token, there are children living in households that are wealthy and have ample income (monetary poor) but that have bad child wellbeing (multidimensionally poor).

2. Good child wellbeing in Vietnam consists of going to school, not working outside of the home, having time and toys to play, living in a good house with a clean toilet and safe drinking water. Household wealth includes sufficient income or the means for earning such an income, such as being healthy and able-bodied and having a stable job.

So why are monetary and multidimensional poverty in Vietnam not the same?

3. One explanation is that many parents work far away from home, leaving children with grandparents or other family members. Children may end up taking care of elderly or disabled family members, sometimes at the expense of being able to go to school or to study at home. Despite ample income, child wellbeing may be low.
4. Another explanation is that government and community programmes such as reduction of tuition fees, free housing and access to sources of safe drinking water can ensure that children have good child wellbeing despite being monetary poor. They gave examples such as the 'poverty certificate' or 'poverty book' policy, which focuses on reducing tuition fees and providing health insurance.
5. Awareness and attitudes of parents and children are important in determining good wellbeing for children. This is even when the household has few financial resources. For example, if parents place importance on their child's education they are more likely to send them to school if they can.

To improve child wellbeing in Vietnam, there are a number of steps that can contribute:

6. While it does not ensure good child wellbeing, it is important to increase the income for parents and households in general. Stable jobs are a crucial source of such income.

There should be Government programmes that help to ensure wellbeing for children living in income poverty such as the reduction of tuition fees, provision of health insurance, free housing, and access to safe water.

Finally, there should be a focus on increasing awareness of the importance of children going to school, studying and playing regardless of financial resources in the family.

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